

Conversation between President Nixon and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird

May 8, 1972

President Nixon: Hello?

Operator: Secretary Laird calling, Mr. President.

RMN: Hello?

Melvin Laird: Mr. President.

RMN: Well, I knew why you weren't there, I knew, uh, I knew you were doing more important things, working with the Congressman.

ML: Well, I went with them and then I came back over here, Mr. President, because I had to get out some messages-

RMN: Good, good, good, good.

ML: And uh, but I did stay with them until they all left...

RMN: Good, good, I appreciate it very much.

ML: But gee, you did a fine job tonight!

RMN: Let me say that, I know this is a tough one, and you know as I told the Cabinet, we can call it either way. Let me tell you that the thing here, because one thing about it, you know, you can scare a few people-I. Bill at the Cabinet meeting was saying, 'Look fellas, this is not a blockade.' Uh, I think you ought to take a little different line. I'd say we're going to do what is necessary, we don't-you know what I mean?

ML: Yes.

RMN: I don't want to indicate what the hell it isn't. You see what I mean? Now incidentally, on the other hand, Mansfield raises the point about how near do we get to China? Now, obviously we're not going to jeopardize the Chinese relationship, but we'll simply say that this is not directed against any other country and we'll take the necessary precautions, but we'll do what's necessary to stop the flow. See?

ML: Yes.

RMN: But, I think the more, if you could be, if I could urge you to be a little more hawkish even than I am--

ML: I will.

RMN: And say you're urging the president, you know. And uh that'll help us a hell of a lot. And also, get all of your people over there at Defense, particularly Intelligence people to, you know, to say, well, you see we may trigger something over here, you never know, you never know.

ML: You know they got in there in good shape.

RMN: Did they?

ML: They got in and got the mines and every plane-

RMN: Was it done? Great.

ML: All the planes are back aboard the carrier, every one of them, they knocked down a MIG in the process.

RMN: Right, would you send, Mel, a 'well done' from me, please?

ML: I will.

RMN: And say that the President asked, I don't know who you'd send it to, McCain?

ML: Well, I think probably I'd send it to Admiral Mack. He's in charge-

RMN: Mack, oh yeah, yeah, we want to get him down there. You send a 'well done' say from Sec. Laird to them, say 'just talked to the president on the phone and he said, 'Well done, keep it up.' OK?

ML: I will.

RMN: The other thing, I was saying to Moorer today, tonight, I want to be sure you know about it, I think, Mel, on our air strikes now, we need to pick our target and do it. In addition to the railroads - I think that the other thing should be P-O-L, P-O-L, P-O-L - you see what I mean?

ML: We're doing that right now, that's what I was going over, Mr. President

RMN: Don't you agree? Because if we get the P-O-L - they can't run those damn trucks.

ML: We're doing that right now, Mr. President.

RMN: Right. OK. Well, thank you a lot.

ML: Thank you, Mr. President. And I think you did a fine job--

RMN: Well, just stick your chin out there and give'em hell. Scare them!

ML: OK.

Conversation between President Nixon and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Thomas Moorer

May 9, 1972

President Nixon: Hello?

Operator: Admiral Moorer returning your call.

RN: Who?

Operator: Admiral Moorer

RN: Oh yes.

Operator: All right here you are.

RN: Hello?

Thomas Moorer: Good Morning, Mr. President.

RN: Well I just wanted to tell you that now we depend on you to see that we don't flub this one.

TM: Yes sir.

RN: Particularly zero in, zero in. Don't go to these secondary targets. We got to get those rail lines. We've got to get the P.O.L. [Petroleum, Oil and Lubricant reserves], and in secondary place the power plants and the airfields. But there is no damned excuse now, because you have what the military has claimed it has never had before. You've got the authority to do it.

TM: Yes sir. And we are going to do it, Mr. President. Alls I wanted to tell you is that I thought that was a magnificent -

RN: I appreciate that. I understand you called last night.

TM: And I wrote you a little note this morning.

RN: Well, thank you. And just stand up - did you do any good with Stennis?

TM: Yes sir. I had Mr. Stennis and most of the armed services committee this morning.

RN: See, we need Stennis, if we can get him.

TM: Yes sir, I think I can get him. I am working on several, but I thought it might be a little hostile, perhaps, but well frankly my hearing this morning, I was there about two hours and a half, was very good.

RN: Good.

TM: Very good sir. Thank you, sir. You can depend on us.

RN: Carry on.

Conversation between H.R. "Bob" Haldeman and Charles Colson

May 8, 1972

H.R. Haldeman: Colson, please.

Operator: They're putting him on, sir.

HRH: Thank you.

Charles Colson: Hello

HRH: Bob, Chuck

CC: Hi, Bob.

HRH: How're you doing?

CC: Well, I'm, I'm overwhelmed by the reaction. Which is--

HRH: Overwhelmed? Why?

CC: Well, because I think it's a hell of a lot more positive than I expected.

HRH: More positive than you thought?

CC: Yeh. I thought we'd get a lot of weak knees who would say "Oh, My God, what are we getting ourselves into."

HRH: You mean that the people you are pushing for support, you're not having any trouble pushing?

CC: Not at all! Jesus, we're getting a very, very enthusiastic reaction.

HRH: Is that more than just the right wing types?

CC: Yeah, yeah. Well, heck yes! I am reading college presidents. I can't believe my eyes, and-

HRH: Yeh, I saw some of these college presidents, and they are willing to line up?

CC: They're sending telegrams, several of them qualifying that they are sending them as individuals. The labor guys are just having orgasms. Jesse Calhoun called me, and he wants to enlist and that kind of a--

HRH: OK, well, be sure we enlist him now. And get him to start the labor guys, that hardhat march is-

CC: He wants to get back into the military, that's what he says--

HRH: Calcoun wants to enlist in the military, huh?

CC: I think these are the overriding feelings, from what I am getting.

HRH: Good.

CC: One - tremendous support, a little feeling of caution, just a thread in there of a little nervousness, but overwhelming support. And the second thing which is coming through - that's the only option he had, what else could he have done? And third - the sincerity, that this man is really just trying so hard--

HRH: So the sincerity still shows through? They don't think he's ...

CC: No. The sincerity is the strong theme.

HRH: OK.

CC: I think we're going to be fine, we came out of that cabinet meeting just beautifully, with

everyone just roaring to go, and Elliot has agreed to go on TV and we got Rush on in the morning--

HRH: Is Rush doing Today tomorrow?

CC: Yes.

HRH: Instead of Buchanan?

CC: Right. Because Buchanan would have just--

HRH: Well, Pat called and volunteered that--

CC: I know, so it was fine. And we got Rush in there instead. We've got the Rogers' briefing tomorrow, which of course, Haig is worried about.

HRH: Yeh, I am too. And we have to work on that. But it's not till three.

CC: No, and I can switch that. I mean I can just let Bill off the hook

HRH: I am not sure you can. If you can't, we'll decide that in the morning, but that's something we have to think about. Maybe we ought to...

CC: Well, did you notice how much stronger he got during the Cabinet meeting, after Eliot spoke and others, he got--

HRH: Yeah, but the problem is that he's really obsessed with having to explain that this is not a blockade and that we aren't really going to hurt anybody, and it doesn't really mean anything, and all that. And that is exactly 180 degrees wrong.

CC: I agree.

HRH: The line here has got to be that this is a blockade; we're going to kick the shit out of them and they've had it!

CC: That's right.

HRH: We can't apologize, we can't back down or back off.

CC: Maybe if Moorer goes with him?

HRH: I'm not sure Moorer is any better.

CC: Really?

HRH: He gets into all the technicalities of how many decibels it takes to detonate the mines and all that crap. Laird is better and Rush would be better. Lets watch Rush tomorrow morning on TV, maybe he is the one we want to use. Because Rush believes in this way down to his core.

CC: Well, we can easily, you know, we've got it set up for three and we can juggle them.

HRH: You got any reading on telegrams at all?

CC: The guy just called me from Vermont and he said Jesus Christ, they can't get into Western Union office.

HRH: Well, now is the time to start hitting Western Union. Let's get the president up out of bed and tell him that we are getting calls from all over the country that those goddamned offices won't take the telegrams and that we are going to make a national scandal out of it. And that they pulled this before, you know, just scare the shit out of him.

CC: It is a shame--

HRH: Tell him they're probably going to have to lose their franchise and we'll have to find a new method of communication.

CC: We are rapidly getting a new method. It's a damn shame, Bob, because a lot of that--

HRH: It's the same old story. Now is the time to start busting them on that.

CC: And we will.

HRH: And get that story out. Tell the people, any people that call and complain that they can't send telegrams, tell them to call their local paper and TV station and say that they can't get through to Western Union.

CC: As a matter of fact I can get that story played out very strongly.

HRH: Good. That's the one to start moving on. And we oughta now get the head of Western Union. We waited long enough now--

CC: I'll call.

HRH: --that we can put the heat on that.

CC: Yeh, because I have that from Vermont, but I also have it from, uh. Jesse Calhoun said that 7

he tried to-

HRH: I just heard from Beebe and he says that a lady that he's never heard of called him and said that she couldn't get through to the Western Union, so she was calling him.

CC: Of course, they can't get through the switchboard either. The only calls I've gotten have been on the direct lines into the office.

HRH: Is our board jammed?

CC: Oh, yes. Totally.

HRH: Good. Be sure everyone knows that.

CC: Yep.

HRH: And we put the full load of operators on, so there is no...

CC: Well, as of 20 minutes ago, the last call I had the guy said that he'd been trying the switchboard for half an hour, and finally found my 4-digit number, so he was able to call direct.

HRH: So what's your own personal view on it?

CC: My personal view? Marvelous. It's so hard when you sit so damn close to it, but he's never been any better in delivery. I loved the delivery. The rhetoric was very, very good, he didn't overstate or oversell, I think he hit it right on the target.

HRH: Right on?

CC: And very firm.

HRH: He suggests you check with Harris and Singlinger and get a reading from them.

CC: All right.

HRH: And what they think.

CC: Singlinger, I've been getting from all day--

HRH: But I mean after tonight.

CC: Right, I'll get both of them

HRH: See what their personal views were.

CC: Yep, OK.

HRH: Then call back over here.

CC: OK, I'll call you back.

Conversation between President Nixon and John Mitchell

May 9, 1972

John Mitchell: Mr. President?

President Nixon: Well as an old navy man I hope you think we finally did something.

JM: Well you did it just right and I thought your presentation last night was just terrific. I think it was probably the best of all of them.

RN: Well I had to do it under a pressure cooker, you know. I wrote the damn thing over the weekend and didn't get the final draft finished until 5:30 and then had to go beat these goddamn senators and then just walk out there almost panting.

JM: Well I tell you, your presentation was the best and I thought the context and content was just absolutely right. You put it right where it should be.

RN: I just talked to Rebozo. He called me. He said he's had the goddamndest reaction in Florida. Of course I suppose he would down there. But he said democrats, republicans-everybody--is saying, "Go to it and by god we finally did something." I don't know what you heard.

JM: Yes that's what we are getting.

RN: And of course the Democrats and politicians are doing just what we expected. They are lying in the bushes instead of supporting the president. But by god they oughta be hit for that.

JM: They will be. As you know we've got this apparatus going over here, but the only problem is that the telegram offices are so jammed up that the people can't get through, and the telephones were so jammed up last night that you just couldn't get the volume through.

RN: What was the reaction you've found last night just talking to folks?

JM: Oh great. Nobody is opposed to it that I have talked to or found. I think everybody has a little concern about the ongoing problems with the summit and so forth.

RN: Yeah, well the summit may be cancelled. We're just going to say, "Well, we expected that and we'll have it at a later time." But we're not going to have an American president go to the summit when Russian tanks are rolling through the streets of Hue.

JM: Well I think you put the ball in their court just right last night. And I think the American public will accept that without any problems what so ever. So I think it's just great all the way around. I have a deep, gut reaction that this is going to have some large psychological effects on the government and the troops.

RN: That's the main affect you know. As you know this kind of operation, it's not technically a blockade but that's what it is. It only has an affect over a period of time. But I can tell you that if it doesn't work psychologically, I will keep the goddamn thing on and lose the election if necessary. But right after the election, we will just level Hanoi. I mean level it.

JM: I don't believe that's going to be necessary. You're tying it in with the prisoners of war and the ceasefire . . .

RN: That really, John, is an offer that - how the hell can anyone say we should do more?

JM: They can't.

RN: With [agreement on] a ceasefire and the POWs, we'll get out in four months.

JM: You heard what Church [?] said?

RN: No, I didn't.

JM: He came out and said it's just great.

RN: Did he agree with it?

JM: He agreed with your terms. Last night he said it and it scares the hell out of me. But it shows that if people are thinking correctly and not acting politically, they would recognize the rationale of it.

RN: One thing I was going to suggest is, wouldn't this be a good time for you and Buckley to frankly get Ashbrook in and say "Look, John, for Christ sake, get behind the president on this."

JM: I've already started that this morning.

RN: He really oughtta get out of the race now. He really ought to.

JM: I started it last week, but it didn't fly, but I think it's got a much greater possibility now.

RN: You might give Reagan a call and ask him to call him. Could you do that?

JM: Sure. I don't think it will fly 'cause this guy has got a little bit in his teeth, but it certainly will pull some of the troops away from this whole thing.

RN: And get Reagan to call some of his troops. Could you do that? Tell him you and I talked.

JM: Yes.

RN: I've approved a trip for Reagan to Europe, incidentally, so he's all set on a nice little junket, so he ought to be happy.

JM: What's the purpose of that?

RN: [Laughing] He just wanted to go to Europe.

JM: How's he going?

RN: I don't know. Just fart around. It's all right.

JM: It's fine. Give him some more traveling time and we'll get more done in California.

Conversation between President Nixon and White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig

May 17, 1972

Richard Nixon: Hello

Alexander Haig: Yes, sir.

RMN: What's the evening report, anything new?

AH: No, sir, it's been weirdly quiet today. An Loc is-- We still haven't gotten word that they linked up, but they're on the verge of it and the attacks have broken off completely there.

RMN: Mmm hmm. But we're continuing to hit them there though, are we?

AH: Yes, sir, today they did get the sorties, at 12:60.

RMN: And they're hitting the Kontum area hard too, are they?

AH: Yes, in the Kontum area, it look like--From all indications that the attack should break within the next 48 hours. 'Course we've been saying that for a week, but Abrams says that the units are all in position now.

RMN: Well, why doesn't he put the whole 1,200 in that place, I mean, if that's where he is--or isn't his intelligence that accurate? He doesn't feel that he could really give that a wallop, if they know they're in place, does he know where they are?

AH: No, I don't think that he knows-- other than they know that the communications are such that they anticipate that.

RMN: Well, he must have it all in mind, at any event.

AH: Yes, sir. I think they're doing quite well. Now we had a report that the Air Force general we sent out there, told the Chairman this morning that he feels that the tide is just turning. I sensed that about 3 days ago.

RMN: Yes, I know, you told me that.

AH: He has now confirmed it himself. He said that they are getting the general appearances is that they've been hurt very badly.

RMN: What is? The one part, Al, that I am going to write a little memorandum on, but I really wish you'd follow up-- I just don't think that Helms' outfit, and that means, of course, even that we all are probably not doing the maximum that what we should in terms of propaganda --in North Vietnam and in South Vietnam with the enemy. Now are we are doing anything like, for a example, saying that, pointing out 'more B-52s are coming' and 'come on over - you're losing', every kind of a thing, I mean, it was commonplace in WWII, but has Helms' outfit come up with anything? I remember I wrote him a memorandum on that a week ago.

AH: Yes, sir, this is not all Helms' people, this is this interdepartmental group, with the State--

RMN: Right, well, For Christ-sake, State doesn't know anything about that sort of thing.

AH: Well, people that do the job are SINPAC and MACV - and they've had millions of leaflets dropped both in the South and in the North.

RMN: Right, but are they, are they playing, I mean frankly, playing the dirty tricks game? That's what you have to do, Al, as you know, you've got to mislead them, you don't tell them the truth, you tell them what's not true and scare the hell out of them.

AH: Right. And also now CIA has got that, they've got the Black Broadcast, which is

threatening invasion and misleading them.

RMN: I think one point that should be made is that to-- Now to make a major effort to get prisoners to come over. Just say 'look it's all over, your homeland is finished and that you'll be treated well', and you know.

AH: I think that's exactly right, sir. Because I got a report from a Frenchman in Hanoi, who is a very reliable guy, and he said that while the control is still quite good, that there are real signs of shortages already. That the people have been bringing the bodies into, that have been bringing the bodies of those killed in our air strikes to the City Hall in Hanoi in outrage and are very upset at what the government has gotten them into.

RMN: Hmm, where would have these people been killed? You mean killed up in the north?

AH: Yes, in the Hanoi area, from the air strikes -and he said that the port is in a very bad shape already and that the strikes have been much more brutal than they had ever experienced before.

RMN: Of course, the ports--you mean apart from the mining?

AH: Apart from the mining, the air strikes.

RMN: Yeh, good, good, good.

AH: So there are signs--and this is a pretty reliable guy. (He a guy that Godley know and relies on.) He says that they are still in firm control, but there is a stronger disillusionment than he's ever sensed there before.

RMN: Mmm hmm. They're getting word to the north too, about the reverses in the south, in the battlefield.

AH: They're concerned about their families The families are concerned about what's happened to the young. This is the kind of thing we are trying to stress in this theme of the leaflets they are dropping up north, that these guys are being totally devastated by B-52s, and they'll never see them again, they're being chained to their weapons in some cases and-

RMN: Yeh, and I would just indicate that, if could tell Helms to indicate that the President has ordered doubling the number of B-52s and that they are on the way. Let's put that out.

AH: All right.

RMN: That the number is, 'Now we have a 100 and the President has ordered another 100 to come in from Europe.' Put that out.

AH: Fine, sir.

RMN: Let them get a little frightened. Anything else you can think of? I just want them to have some imagination, Al, I don't--We don't do anything from the NSC group and that's one place that we have been terribly weak throughout this whole damned miserable war, on the propaganda side, just because it is in too many hands. Christ, State doesn't understand that, they are thinking the usual, you know what's true and all that crap - this is war. Remember George Creel in WWI and, you know, even that silly OSS did pretty well at times. My point is, I really feel that this is the time now, if the propaganda - if the tide of battle is turning, that's the time to pour in the propaganda, don't you think so?

AH: Yes, I do, sir. I think it's very important that we do up north especially, and in the areas where there have been heavy losses. I think we may see some increased sapper activity and terrorist activity here, starting Friday.

RMN: Because that's Ho Chi Minh's birthday?

AH: Right, sir. That'll probably show itself in the delta and around III Corps area...

RMN: Well, I suppose all of our guys, the Americans, are certainly alert to that now, aren't they?

AH: Oh, yes, they're on full alert for it.

RMN: The other thing. It seems to me, remember you told me about that. Look, tell them to do one thing: that C1 or C5 -that plane carrying ammunition that they knocked off, you know that plane with munitions that killed seven guys--

AH: Oh, yeh, this morning in Kontum--

RMN: Why not just put 20 B-52s in the general area there, just to show them that Goddamnit, that if they pull this sort of thing, they are going to be hit, or has that been done? You know, I really feel, that when--what was it, a rocket attack?

AH: We don't know whether this was artillery, or mortar or rocket. It was just a lucky hit on the damn plane, and two South Vietnamese planes were hit too. That airfield at Kontum is now under pretty heavy fire.

RMN: Well, but Abrams is hitting that area and around it, isn't he?

AH: Very heavily. They broke up an attack yesterday with B-52s, and another one landed right by the attacking unit and the attack broke off, but the attacks by fire are continuing.

RMN: I see. Well, I guess we are just doing everything we can. Just keep the feet to the fire.

And on the propaganda side, just tell them that, you can pass this word that I am disappointed that I haven't had any ideas from the Helms' outfit and none from the other outfits, and I want to see some. I really want to see some Friday noon before I leave. What the hell are their new ideas on the propaganda front? Can you do that? Tell them I expect some. I don't want a long paper and I don't want a long report, but what new things can they suggest doing at this time, having in mind the fact that the tide of battle may be changing and that we really want to pour terror into the hearts of the enemy.

AH: Right. I did have a memo being prepared right now to tell you what we have done very briefly.

RMN: But I want some new ideas. Just tell them to work all night, that I expect it. You know, they can do that. It's not a routine business. Those poor guys in that plane and now seven of them dead - let these bastards that we have over here work overnight for a change, tell them to get off their ass and think of something.

AH: Fine, sir. We'll be going to get on that right away and think of some new programs here.

RMN: Good. Apparently Boat (?) is doing a good job, isn't he?

AH: He's doing a superb job, and the Chairman has great reliance on him.

RMN: Good. That was a good move. OK, Al, thank you.